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The Culture of Dahlias

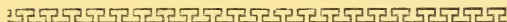
COMPLIMENTS OF
WYOMING DAHLIA GARDEN

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TUBERS FOR SPRING PLANTING
CUT FLOWERS IN SEASON
VISITORS ALWAYS WELCOME



The best average time to plant dahlia tubers, in this vicinity, is about June 1st. They may however be planted with success as early as May 15th or as late as July 1st.

Prepare the soil thoroughly by digging to the full depth of a spading fork. After digging, distribute hydrated lime evenly over the surface. A fifty pound bag will cover 1,200 square feet.

Set strong stakes six feet long, spaced three feet apart each way. Dig a hole at the base of each stake six inches deep, lay in the tuber flat on its side, with the sprout facing up, close to the stake. Cover three inches deep with fine top soil, thus leaving the hole one-half full, to be filled after plant comes up. Do not hill the soil around the plant, but rather leave a slight depression to catch the rain.

As the plant grows, tie the main stalk to the stake with two-inch strips of cloth, allowing play enough to prevent binding, as the stalk will often grow two inches or more in diameter. A tie should be made between each joint and string should not be used.

It is best to allow only one main stalk to grow and in no case more than two. Should others develop they should be carefully removed from the tuber. If cut off at ground two more will grow from the joints left under ground.

Just as soon as the plants are up, the most important thing to do is to keep the soil loose and mellow by cultivating once or twice a week and just as soon after each rain as the soil will permit. Stop deep cultivation as soon as the buds develop.

Select the best piece of ground you have for your dahlia bed. An old vegetable garden is ideal, but any open spot where there is a good circulation of air and sun for at least half the day will do. Do not plant dahlias around the foundation of a house, near a hedge, under trees or any place where roots of any kind can

reach the bed. Do not plant anything else in the bed with your dahlias.

It is essential that the soil have good drainage. Heavy solid ground will produce large plants with hard wood, a lot of foliage and few and poor flowers. Heavy clay soil should be lightened by broadcasting coarse coal ashes to the depth of three or four inches, spading them in and thoroughly incorporating them with the soil.

Normal seasons it is not necessary to water the plants, except during occasional dry spells. During the season of 1923 it was necessary to water almost continually. When you do water it is most important to soak the ground to the depth of ten inches or more and follow with a thorough cultivation as soon as the condition of the soil will allow. To sprinkle the surface is worse than no water at all. Watering can best be done in the evening, after the sun is off the plants. Use a garden hose with a fine sprinkler nozzle, set on a rest and allow the water to run until the ground will absorb no more, before moving to a new position. No water should be used at time of planting and unless a very dry season not before the flower buds begin to form.

Dahlias do best in a moderately rich soil and fertilizers should be used with care. I use nothing but bone meal, which is very slow acting and does not force the plants. If applied in fall use the coarse ground, if in the spring use fine ground or flour. Broadcast evenly over the surface. Do not put any fertilizer in the hole at time of planting and later do not apply any close around the stalk of the plant.

When the plants come up let them alone to grow naturally. Do not pinch or cut out the top, or remove any branches. Disbudding does not mean to sacrifice your early flowers and nothing is gained by so doing unless you are growing dahlias solely for the purpose of ex-

hibiting a few large specimens at the fall shows. To get a continuous succession of large flowers with long stems it is necessary to disbud as follows. The buds form in sets of three on the end of the branches. As soon as these buds are large enough to handle remove the two side buds, leaving the center one. Then go down the stem to the first pair of leaves and remove the two sprouts in the axils of these leaves. This will allow you to pick the flower with a long stem and in the meantime the lower sprouts will have developed into flowering branches to be treated in the same way.

After the plants are killed by frost cut the stalks off a few inches above the ground. Dig the clumps up with a fork, being very careful not to break the tubers or detach them from the stem. Wash off all the dirt with a spray from a garden hose, lay them in the sun upside down for an hour or two, and store for the winter in wooden boxes lined with paper. Keep the boxes in as cool a place as you have in a frost-proof cellar. Before doing this trim off with a pair of shears all the rootlets, broken neck or defective tubers. While the tubers are still damp it is a good idea to write the name on them with an indelible pencil. If the mother bulb, (the one you planted), shows any sign of rot it should be cut out and burned. The tops of the plants should be piled up to dry and burned as soon as possible. In the spring the clumps must be divided to single tubers and each tuber must have an eye or sprout on the crown where it was attached to the stalk, otherwise they will not grow. All of the tubers will not have eyes and these are worthless.

As a matter of insurance I bed all valuable tubers in clear sand and also mix a handful of tobacco dust with the soil in each hole. Spray three times at two-week intervals with Bordeaux mixture and if any insects appear in number throw tobacco dust over the plants.